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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

January 29, 2004

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STATE ENVIRONMENTAL AGENCIES, MASSACHUSETTS **DENTAL SOCIETY TARGET DENTAL AMALGAM MERCURY WASTE**

Mercury-recycling program is unveiled at Yankee Dental Congress

The Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA) and the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) joined the Massachusetts Dental Society (MDS) today in announcing a voluntary program to remove dental amalgam containing mercury from the waste stream, which will reduce the amount of mercury entering wastewater from dental offices by up to 95 percent over the next two years.

“This program is a model partnership for EOEA’s ‘Lean and Green’ initiative, providing high quality environmental protection with flexibility for the businesses who comply voluntarily,” said Environmental Affairs Secretary Ellen Herzfelder. “The Massachusetts Dental Society is showing true leadership on this important environmental and public health issue, and their participation will allow us to achieve our clean up goals without putting any dentists at a competitive disadvantage.”

Secretary Herzfelder, DEP Commissioner Robert W. Gollidge, Jr., and MDS President Dr. René Bousquet outlined the dental amalgam mercury-recycling program at the Yankee Dental Congress in Boston. Four Massachusetts dentists were also recognized for participating in a study that evaluated amalgam separator technologies.

In Massachusetts, over 50 percent of the lakes and ponds tested have fish with mercury levels that render them unsafe to eat. State health officials previously issued a statewide advisory that warned pregnant women, nursing mothers of reproductive age and children under 12 not to consume fish caught in fresh water bodies. Mercury in fish is a problem because it is extremely toxic to the brain, especially in children and the developing fetus. According to the National Academy of Science, in the United States nearly 10 percent of women of childbearing age have mercury exposures above EPA-recommended safe levels, and over 350,000 newborns are at risk for mercury poisoning each year.

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Mercury in the environment comes from sources such as trash incinerators, medical waste incinerators, sludge incinerators, power plants, broken mercury products, and waste dental amalgam. If disposed of in wastewater, amalgam particles can release mercury into effluent water or when sludge is incinerated or applied to landfills. Environmental releases of mercury attributable to waste amalgam can be largely eliminated by using amalgam separators and best management practices. These ensure that mercury in waste amalgam is recycled, keeping it out of wastewater and solid waste.

“DEP and the Massachusetts Dental Society have worked cooperatively in the past to remove old elemental mercury from dentists’ offices, and this voluntary amalgam program is the next logical step in taking a significant source of mercury out of the waste stream,” said Commissioner Gollidge. “This program encourages dentists to do the right thing for the environment while they qualify for incentives that will help them implement this protective technology.”

“For the past decade, the Massachusetts Dental Society has been working with state officials on reducing the amount of mercury-containing amalgam being discharged into wastewater. In fact, three years ago, we were the first dental association in the country to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the state,” said Dr. Bousquet. “This is an exciting next step in the process to ensure the safe removal and disposal of amalgam, and we are confident that it will be supported by dentists across the Commonwealth.”

To participate in the voluntary program outlined today, dental practices and facilities will need to certify to DEP that they have installed an amalgam separator system that removes at least 95 percent of the amalgam waste containing mercury. The program also requires that all amalgam waste containing mercury is recycled.

Dentists who certify on or before January 31, 2005, will be exempt from new regulatory requirements for the installation, operation, maintenance and upgrade of amalgam separator systems and associated DEP fees until January 31, 2010. If fewer than 50 percent of Massachusetts’s dentists have certified with DEP by January 31, 2005, new regulations will go into effect on or about February 1, 2005. If more than 50 percent of Massachusetts’ dentists have certified with DEP by January 31, 2005, the new regulations will be postponed one year, until on or about February 1, 2006, and a second year for voluntary certification will be allowed that will offer a shorter exemption period.

This initiative follows a study in which dentists allowed their practices to be used to evaluate four different technologies. The four dentists honored today for their participation are: Dr. Joseph Ciampa of Winthrop; Dr. Richard Newberg of Brookline; Dr. Michael Swartz of West Roxbury; and Dr. Robert Evans of Newton.

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